

THE BRIDE AND HER ORNAMENTS—THE SIN OF FORGETTING GOD

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**A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?
Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.”
Jeremiah 2:32.*

IT is a clear proof of the great love of God to His people that He will not lose their love without earnest expostulation. When you do not care at all for a person, he may love you or hate you, it is all the same to you. But when you have great love for him, then you earnestly desire to possess his heart in return. This, then, is clear proof that God greatly loves His people, since, whenever their hearts wander from Him, He is greatly grieved. And He rebukes them and earnestly pleads with them, setting the coldness of their hearts in a true light and striving to bring them back to warm affection towards Himself. Not only are God's rebukes proofs of His love, but when He goes farther and deals out blows as well as words, there is love in every stroke of His hand. Most truly does He say, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten,” since rebukes and chastening are proofs that He will not lose our hearts without a struggle for them. Do not look, therefore, upon a sermon that rebukes as something to be avoided. Far from it! Hear it and accept it as a token of love from God to your souls. That man is very foolish who will not hear the warning of a friend. Few prize a friend's rebukes and yet a wise man knows that there is no greater token of the affection of a friend than when he will undertake the unpleasant duty of pointing out our faults. Many parents are like Eli—they cannot endure the task of chastening their children—and so, when their sons grow up to be their plague, they must not wonder, for they have procured this evil to themselves by their unworthy love of ease.

Our heavenly Father is never an Eli! He will not “spare the rod and spoil the child.” He loves us too well to suffer us to go on in our iniquity. He will not stay His hand and leave us to perish. He will scourge rather than abandon. He will chide rather than lose. Today He speaks in tones of severity that He may not be compelled to utter, tomorrow, words of doom. Accept, then, at this time, dear friend, whatever shall come to you out of this text. If it should be bitter in your mouth, yet receive it thankfully from God as good medicine to your spirit and so may His Spirit cause it to be.

Coming to the text, in which God proves His love to His people because He will not let their love readily go away from Him, notice, first, a grievous sin. “My people have *forgotten Me*”; secondly, a chiding question about that sin. “Can a maid forget her ornaments or a bride her attire?” And then, thirdly, let us observe the call to repentance which lies within the text, like perfume in a flower. If we have forgotten God, let us grieve over such forgetfulness, and turn to Him at once with full purpose of heart—even unto God our exceeding joy!

I. First, then, here is A VERY GRIEVOUS SIN. “My people have forgotten Me days without number.” Observe whom they had forgotten—it will help us to see the sin of it. The Lord says, “My people have forgotten *Me*.” It would not have mattered half as much if they had forgotten their dearest friends—if the husband had forgotten his wife, or the mother her child—but here are favored men and women who have forgotten their God, their Father, their life, their all! “My people have forgotten Me, their God. Other nations, having set up their false gods, did not forget them, but, with blind pertinacity of devotion, they bowed before them. But My people have forgotten their God, the only God, the living and true God. My people have forgotten Me, the good God, whom it is pleasure to remember.”

“You are good, and do good,” said the psalmist, and it is true. Yet too often we forget the source of all goodness. If we could forget the evil, it would be well, but to forget the only and essential Good is sad, indeed. “My people have forgotten Me,” whom they were bound in duty to remember. God is our Creator—shall we not remember Him that made us? God is our preserver. Shall we not remember Him in whom “we live, and move, and have our being”? God is our Father—shall children forget the Father

at whose table they feed and from whose lips they are comforted! God is our all-in-all and shall we yet forget *Him*? Surely, it would be better to lose memory than for memory to lose its hold upon God! My people have forgotten Me! God, the good, the best, who has a chief right to be remembered!

Brethren, there is great evil in our hearts, or it would be so difficult to forget God as to be impossible. A friend has gone away from us and we do not see him, but he has left so many tokens of his goodness that we are reminded of him every day. Is it not so with God? Has He not left us innumerable tokens of His affection for us? Ought we to forget when so many forget-me-nots are round about us? But, supposing that friend has not gone away at all, but is living with us in the house and enters, even, into our chamber—what shall we say if we forget one who is constantly with us? No man is as present with his friend as God is with His people! He is *in* us and round about us! Never can we depart from Him, for we are not only in Him, but He is in us and He sees all our ways. Oh, strange sin that we should forget one who is everywhere present and manifests that presence in deeds of love! O forgetful creature, what do you think of your Lord? What? Do you owe the breath in your nostrils to God, and yet can you forget? Is the bread upon your table put there by the hand of a God whom you do not remember? Are the very clothes upon your back the gift of His divine charity, and do you forget Him? You would be in the grave—no, you would be in hell, but for His mercy—and yet is He not in all your thoughts? Oh, this wicked forgetfulness of ours! Let us forget all else besides, but let it not be charged to us that we have forgotten our God! Yet it is so written, “My people have forgotten Me.”

Who were they that forgot God? That casts a second light upon this sin. “My people have forgotten Me. Not strangers, not heathen, not those who have only heard of Me but have never known Me, but My people.” It signifies, “My chosen, My elect, a people whom I have taken out from the midst of the earth that they may be a people unto Me forever. My people have forgotten Me.” Chosen of God and yet forget electing love? “My people.” It is a redeemed people who have become the Lord’s because they are not their own, but are bought with a price. He has redeemed them unto Himself forever—redeemed them from among men by the matchless price of His only-begotten Son’s life! And shall it be that those on whom there is the eternal blood-mark—who are set apart by sacrifice to be God’s own, that they shall forget Him? Oh, sad ingratitude! “My people.” That is to say, a people not only chosen and redeemed, but brought to know Him, brought into fellowship with Him, brought into relationship with Him, brought absolutely into *union* with Him—they have forgotten Him! You that sat at Jesus’ feet and drank in His loving words! You that sat at His table, and to whom He was made known in the breaking of bread! You that have laid your head upon the bosom of the Lord—can it, shall it be said of you, “My people have forgotten Me”? Oh, but this is sad! “He that eats bread with Me has forgotten Me. He that said He would die for My sake has forgotten Me. He that sang just now—

*‘Have You a lamb in all Your flock
I would disdain to feed?
Have You a foe before whose face
I fear Your cause to plead?’”*

“He has forgotten Me!”

Alas, my brothers and sisters, that you and I should have been upon the mount with Jesus; that we should have been in the garden with Him; that we should have danced for very joy of heart in His presence, and should have felt ourselves next door to the gates of heaven when He has laid bare His heart to us; and yet it should ever be said of us that we have forgotten Him! This will be sad indeed, if ever it comes to this! And yet this is the crime that is laid at the door of His people. “My people have forgotten Me.”

Observe sadly the space in which they had forgotten—in the case of Israel, it is added, “days without number.” Ah me! I hope it has not come to that with any of us here present! And yet it may. It may. I may be touching a chord, now, which shall awaken the saddest memories. “Days without number.” How long is it, friend, since you were in the habit of walking with God? How long is it since you have seen the face of the Well-Beloved? I ventured to put that question once to a professor and, shaking his head, he replied, “Don’t ask me that. If you will ask me whether I have been a drunk; whether I have been dishonest in business; whether I have done any positive action by which I have degraded the Christian name, I can answer you without fear. But if you ask, How long since I have had fellowship with Christ, I cannot—I dare not answer you.”

Yet I venture to press the question and I hope the answer will not be, “I have forgotten Him days without number.” I hope you will not sing, as Cowper did—

***“What peaceful hours I then enjoy’d!
How sweet their memory still!
But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill.”***

On the contrary, may it be yours and mine to be kept from forgetting God at all! And if there ever should be a moment in which we wander, may it be a small moment, much lamented and never repeated! May our soul soon come back as the needle of the compass returns to its pole. Turn it awhile with your finger and you may move it east, west, south—but take your finger away and back it comes to its pole—so may it be with us! May we be like the birds of the air which at eventide seek their nests; as the stone may be thrown aloft by force, but naturally returns to the earth, so may we, if tossed about by Satan, fall back upon our firm resting place in Jesus! May our forgetfulness be for a small moment, but in life and death may we remember our Well-Beloved.

You see, the sin lies in this, that we should forget God; that we should do it and do it, “days without number.” How is God forgotten? What are the manifestations of this offense? Some professors evidently forget God by their worldliness. When they were in a humbler condition of society they were known to find great enjoyment at prayer meetings—the assembling of the saints together was very joyful to them. The reading and hearing of the Word of God were gracious refreshments to them, but they are now too rich to care for this light bread! They have prospered so much that if they prosper much more it will be a thousand times worse than adversity, as in the case of the celebrated captain who, when his soldiers said they had won a victory, said, “One more such victory as this and we shall be defeated forever.” Such rising men, like the Israelites, have been filled with the quails, but while the meat is yet in their mouths the wrath of God has come upon them. They have been fattened with the treasures of the world, but their souls have been starved to very skeletons, for they have not fed upon the things of God! Some that were high professors now seem to have no religion whatever—they mix with worldly people—and seem quite happy with them. I have seen the hand of God go out against such followers of Demas. They prospered, and as they prospered they became less and less attentive to divine things. They turned aside from the truth of God and their children have grown up to be utter worldlings—some of their sons to be debauched and depraved—till the name that stood high in the church of God is struck out of the roll of Israel and their family is rather numbered among the sons of Belial than among the saints of the Most High!

Such have forgotten God, “days without number.” O my beloved comrades in the army of Christ, may you all be preserved from such a curse! Some have forgotten God by self-seeking. They live unto themselves. It is clear that though once they seemed to have a zeal for God, now their zeal is entirely to push their own way, to make their own fortunes to plant out their children—anything and everything but the glory of God and the love of souls. And yet they profess to be God’s people even now! True is the lament, “My people have forgotten Me.” It is well to forget self to glorify God—but to make self our god is a thing accursed in the highest degree. Some, too, show that they forget God by the failure of their trust. They are in trouble and they are very anxious. Why? Because they have forgotten God, though He has promised to help them; they are wondering what is to become of them, looking all about them with the greatest amount of carking care that even a worldling might feel. And if you say to them, “God will provide, God is your helper,” they have forgotten God, they have left Him out of their calculations. They are fretting and worrying. They are troubled and cast down because they have forgotten God. You can do this in your daily concerns until you may act as if God, Himself, were dead! It is sad, indeed, when a Christian acts upon atheistic principles and despairs as if he had no God to succor him! Some people, when things run a little cross to them; some working men when they are out of work; some men when they cannot see God’s work prospering just as they would have it, leave out of their calculations the one great worker, the one great force—and soon get troubled, cast down and go crawling about the world full of distrust.

Ah me, what evils come to men when they have forgotten God! Alas, there are some who add to this a forgetfulness of God through neglect of private devotion. Prayers are slurred over. Drawing near to God becomes a form and a pretense. The Word of God is read, but it is not read with the view of finding God in the sacred volume and having fellowship with Him through His word. Oh, it is sad when it can be said that God’s people are forgetting Him in the closet! “It was such a busy day,” says one, “I could not find time to pray.” Remember how Martin Luther acted—he said that He must have three hours prayer one day because it was such a busy day that He should not have strength to get through it if he

did not have extra time for devotion! It is foolish to say, “I have more to do and so I will take less time in getting strength to do it.” As well might the mower say, “It is a bigger field to mow and so I will take less trouble in sharpening my scythe.” It is, depend upon it, a dead waste of time to be short in drawing near to God! The Lord might well complain—“My people have forgotten Me; they have not waited upon Me in wrestling prayer; they have not cried to Me during the day; they have not lifted up their hearts to Me in the moment of trouble; they have not consulted Me in difficulty; they have not rejoiced in Me in the time of their joy. They have forgotten Me.”

And you and I can do it in a very high sense by a breach of communion, by getting out of fellowship with God, by walking contrary to Him so that He walks contrary to us. It is very bad walking and very bad living when God and we are at cross-purposes. It is a very sweet thing, when you are conscious of having done wrong, to go back to your heavenly Father at once and admit it and get right again. How willing He is to receive us! How glad He is to blot out the past and let bygones be bygones and to let us start anew with Him! He delights to forgive! Sometimes we let the stones accumulate till there is quite a heap and they are made into a wall which blocks our way. If every stone had been flung away, one by one, how much easier it would have been! There would not be clouds of dust if we kept our ways well watered with daily repentance. There would not be a separation between God and our soul in great things if we would not allow it in little things. But, I fear too often it may be said of this high point of rapturous fellowship with God, “My people have forgotten Me days without number.” I scarcely need, I think, to talk longer about this sin, except to notice that if we ever do forget God, it leads to all sorts of mischief. We lose our joy and our comfort—and then we lose our strength and our watchfulness. And then we backslide by little and little and then, probably, we fall into one sin and then into another, if not into a third, more grievous still!

David had never sinned with Bathsheba if he had not forgotten his God. By degrees we get hardened about our state, and soon it comes to this—that we have lost the presence of God, and do not care whether we have it or not. Oh, this is a sad, sad state of heart! God save us from it! May it never be said of us, “My people have forgotten Me days without number.”

II. And now, dear friends, I call your attention to THE CHIDING QUESTION which is the very marrow of the text—“Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?” And I suppose that question is put, first, because there are many trivial things which occupy minds so that they cannot forget them. How sad it is that the grandest things, the best things, should not equally engross our thoughts! Now, I will not say a word about you Western women that are here—of course, you do not care about ornaments or dress—at least, you should not! But Eastern women were very fond of ornaments, and it was a question which every Oriental could understand, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?” Of course such forgetfulness was impossible. The young woman’s mind was full of her jewels! Isaiah gives you a long list that seems to have been cut out of the fashion-book of the day—a long list of various things that ladies used to wear in those days—and these they never forgot. Their minds doted upon them and when the marriage day came round, that was the main thought—how they should be dressed, how they should glitter before all onlookers! Forget her ornaments? The question is absurd! The maid’s mind was taken up with them! Could a bride forget her attire? It could not be! And yet I venture to say that these things are trifles—that the costliest jewels in the world are nothing but mere stones, that the richest dress that ever was made is excelled by birds and flies, and that the flowers of the field far surpass anything that can be manufactured by the needle!

When the attire is all fitted, and the ornaments are all in their places, the whole matter is a trifle. We should have had no need of either ornament or attire if it had not been for sin. Strange that the insignia of our fall should become the ground of our boasting! Yet so it is. But here is the point—do, then, these Eastern women value their jewels and their dress so much that they cannot forget them? Are their heads filled with these things so that they never slip out of their memories? And do the people of God forget their God? I do not know a stronger way of putting it. Can these trifles secure their places so surely, and shall the most supreme good so readily escape our thoughts? Shame on us! Every time we see one who in dressing has evidently paid the daintiest attention to every pin, we ought to stand rebuked! When we see a woman curling, plaiting, or bedecking her hair, or putting on jewels, let us think to ourselves, “Does she pay so much attention to such a thing as that, and do I think so little of my God? Have I so much desire to be dressed in the rich things that the Divine Bridegroom has provided for me that I take little notice of the treasures of His grace?” That is the first word of rebuke. It is a very powerful one to those who think it over. Shall trifles be remembered and God be forgotten?

The next is this—if a bride *did* forget her attire, or a maid *did* forget her ornaments, it would be very unreasonable behavior. The thing was so unreasonable that it was quite unknown! Suppose we found an Eastern woman having no regard whatever, on her marriage day, to her attire? She would be thought to be mad! They would say, “This is so contrary to all women’s ways in this part of the country that she must have lost her reason.” It is unreasonable that a bride should forget her ornaments and her attire—but how infinitely more unreasonable it is that you and I should forget God! He is our diadem of glory—He is our beauty of holiness! In Christ we are arrayed in raiment of needlework, and our garments are of worked gold! Can we, *shall* we forget *Him*? There may be a reason for forgetting to eat bread. There may be a reason for forgetting to put on one’s garments. Such neglects have been reasonable in times of fire, or danger to life, but there never can be a reason for forgetting God! A child of God is in the most unreasonable condition in which a human being can be when he is living a single day without remembering his God, his life, his heaven, his all-in-all!

Next, it would have been a most unseasonable thing for a bride to forget her attire at her wedding. If she forgot her dress on other days, it might be well enough, but when the marriage drew near, for the bride to forget her attire would be thought a most unseasonable neglect. Forget it tomorrow, if you will, but not when your marriage has come! You may have forgotten it many days ago, but do not forget it, now, that the happy day has arrived. A bride who forgets her attire would be something like the foolish virgins who forgot to take oil in their vessels with their lamps. And, certainly, it is a most unseasonable thing for me and you to forget our God while we are here! Let the soldier, when the arrow is flying from every bush, forget his armor, but let us not forget our God! Let the hungry man, when famine rages through the land, forget his supply of bread, but let us not forget the food of our souls, which is our Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, when dangers assail you, temptations surround you, corruptions rage within you, and Satan molests you, forget not, then, your God! And I will guarantee you, if you do not forget God on earth, you never will in heaven, for there we shall be all taken up with Him and never, for a moment, shall our thoughts wander from our God, our heaven, our all-in-all! However, now, at any rate, it would be unseasonable in the highest degree to forget your God. Notice the conduct of the maid or the conduct of the bride with regard to her ornaments. What does the maid do? Her conduct is the reverse of forgetfulness as to dress and ornaments. She labors hard to obtain her ornaments and to gain her attire. Many women in the East give up every coin that they have, and turn all into silver. They do not care about storing up coins—they prefer the precious metal in the form of rings for their ankles, arms, necks, noses, and ears. It is their life’s work to provide themselves with ornaments for the marriage day. While they do this, let us do better; let us store up the thoughts of Christ, the words of Christ, and the things of Christ; and let us labor, let us wear ourselves out to get more and more of Christ that we may be adorned with Him and made comely in His comeliness!

When the Eastern woman has, with great difficulty, obtained her ornaments and her attire, she then thinks a great deal of them. She preserves them with much care. She will, if possible, prevent a thief from taking away a ring or gem. She locks them up carefully. Oh, that we did store up every bit we get of our Lord’s love, and put it by to keep it, never losing any pearl that we find, or any ring that we fashion by experience! I say that the Eastern woman thinks about her bridal attire. Why, we hear of them *dreaming* about it—dreaming about the next bracelet they will buy, the next jewel they will hang about their necks! Would to God we were as much taken up with the preciousness of Christ! I sometimes dream of Christ, and when I do, I am glad, for this is proof that my thoughts have been with Him when I was awake, or they would not have been with Him when I was asleep. Oh, to have our whole soul occupied with thoughts of Christ and divine things! How joyfully the Eastern woman puts on her jewels, puts on her attire. She has these things to wear. I am ashamed of those Christians who are ashamed of Christ. They have jewels—I hope they have, but they are very wary of ever showing them. Perhaps they get some Christian friend into a corner and they say, “I have a jewel that I mean to wear, but not yet. I am afraid it should not be seen as yet, but I will show it if you will not tell anybody else.” If anybody comes round after a sermon and gently inquires, “Have you any of the precious things of Christ?” these timid ones blush and half deny their own joy! Some people—yes, some of Christ’s well-beloved ones—whisper, “I hardly know.” Is this after the right manner? The Eastern woman puts everything upon her on her marriage—and Eastern ladies at a banquet are all ablaze with diamonds and jewels—gold and silver.

I wish you Christian people would publicly put on your priceless jewels and never be ashamed of them! Do you know anything about Christ? Tell it! Tell with, and you will soon know more! Do you know anything about Christ? Live it! Live it, and you will soon have more! Put on your jewels! I do not see, while the Bridegroom is about why you should put on your everyday rags. I have seen young folks smarten themselves up when their beloved has come to see them, and oh, since *our* Beloved is always coming to see us, we ought to keep ourselves in good trim, well decked in the graces of His Spirit! “Shall a maid forget her ornaments or a bride her attire?” In the presence of Christ let us glory in Him! Let us delight ourselves in Him! Let us tell the world we never can have enough of Jesus, our Lord! And when they ask, “What is your Beloved more than any other beloved?” let us show how He has enriched us and blessed us with His love and grace; and let this be our happy answer to an unbelieving generation!

III. Now I close with a few words of CALL TO REPENTANCE if we have, in any measure or degree, forgotten our God. I am sure, first, that our God does not deserve to be treated so. “You use no other friend so ill.” Such love, such love, such wondrous love, infinite, unending, everlasting love to you! And can you forget? Can you forget? So undeserving and yet so favored! Can you forget your Friend? Loved by God as He loves His own Son! Can you forget? Have you forgotten? Will not the time past suffice for that? A half a minute’s forgetfulness of God is half a minute too long! Let it not come to be “days without number.” But, if the number is ever so small, let us weep to think we should have forgotten Him at all! Let our sorrows flow at the recollection that He has never forgotten us—no, never for a moment—and yet we have forgotten Him. Our names have been on Jesus’ breastplate, and on His shoulders days without number—shall His name be always out of our minds? “I have engraved you on the palms of My hands,” He says. Let us engrave His name upon the tablets of our hearts! Think for a minute, if He had forgotten you—forgotten you in your merriest moment, yes, in your *holiest* moment—what would have been your portion? If God had suspended the outflow of His grace, and left you to yourselves, what had been your fate? Oh, my God, my God, if You had once forgotten me, where had I been? But He never has forgotten us! He is not forgetting us at this moment. He says to each one, however wandering, “I do earnestly remember you.” He will never forget us. The dying thief said, “Lord, remember me,” and Jesus did remember him! He cries, “I remember you, the love of your betrothal.” Lord, do you remember *me*? Then would I smite my heart to think I ever should have forgotten You! Oh, how can we forget when God is our diadem of glory? It is our highest privilege that He is ours and we are His! God is our beauty, the honor and excellence of all His saints; it is this that makes us illustrious in the eyes of cherubim and seraphim—that God is ours and we are His! God is our joy, our only joy, and our overflowing joy! He that knows God has heaven within His spirit even now.

Come, let us not forget again, but let us bind the glorious name of our Lord about our heart. May the sweet Spirit do it now, for Jesus Christ’s sweet love’s sake. Amen.

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